

First of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

GIFTS FROM THE INDIANS

by

MARIE SVOBODA

Raymond Foundation



Museum Stories, No. 341

October 4, 1958

Gifts from the Indians

How many know of the important gifts that the American Indians gave to us? We have received gifts of food, medicines, building materials, games, and cities! This sounds a little strange, doesn't it? But what would we do without corn, cotton, rubber, and potatoes? These are all plants that were cultivated by the Indians for thousands of years before the Europeans discovered the New World.

Most American dinners include the "Irish" potato, either mashed, fried, or baked. The potato is not Irish at all. It was cultivated for ages by South American Indians. In the early 1500's the potato was taken to Spain, and from there it spread to Italy and Belgium. It finally got to Ireland, where the climate, soil, and rainfall helped potato breeders to develop the large potato that we use today.

Corn is another important Indian food. Methods of planting, tending, harvesting, and preserving corn, which had been developed over many hundreds of years by the Indians, were copied by the Europeans who came to live in the New World. In addition to corn, many other foods that we eat are really Indian foods—lima beans, kidney beans, cranberries, strawberries, maple sugar, pumpkins, squashes, and peanuts.

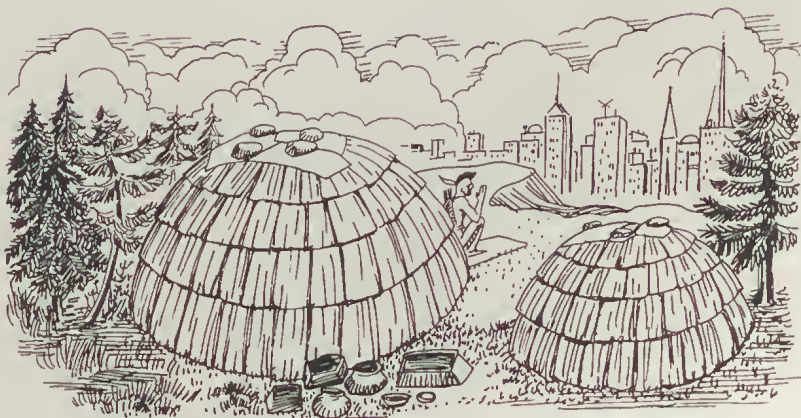
Tobacco was cultivated by the Indians for so long that to them it was almost a sacred plant and was used mainly in religious ceremonies and important meetings. In Europe tobacco was first used as a medicine. This "medicine," however, was thought to be too pleasant to use only when one was sick. Before long, tobacco was smoked only for pleasure.

The early settlers used a number of Indian medicines. Some of the Indians' remedies were good and others were not. Certain South American Indians, for example, chewed the leaves of the coca plant to relieve pain. The modern pain-relieving drug cocaine, which is not used much any more, comes from this plant. Quinine, cascara, and witch hazel are Indian medicines. Surprisingly enough, curare, which was originally a South American arrow poison, is now used as a kind of medicine.

The American Indians not only gave us foods and medicines but they also gave us some of our most popular sports. Did you ever stop to think of the number of sports or games that started with the Indians? How about canoeing, tobogganing, and lacrosse? Other things that we received from the Indians are moccasins, snowshoes, and hammocks.

Two of our most important everyday products were obtained from the Indians—rubber and cotton. As early as 1520 the Spanish conquistadores found Indians bouncing rubber balls in the courtyards of Mexico City. Cotton was a plant cultivated in both the New World and Old World, but an American cotton forms the largest part of the world's supply.

It was mainly because of Indians that certain large cities such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City had their beginnings. The Indians did a lot of traveling. Their trails crisscrossed the length and width of North America. Some Indian trails led to good camp sites or to hunting and fishing grounds. They followed the easiest routes over and through the mountains and through the safest waterways. Certain trading posts that were located on these trails eventually grew into cities. Many of our towns and villages in the United States have Indian names and so do many of our states. A few such Indian names are Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Dakota, Nebraska, and Mississippi.



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Second of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

CULTIVATED PLANTS

by

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Cultivated Plants

The Indians of the Chicago region and of the eastern woodlands were farmers, or at least they were during the summer months. After spending the winter hunting in the forest, these Indians returned to their summer village in time to set out their crops. Corn, beans, pumpkins, squashes, and other things were planted close to the village in natural clearings or in patches that the Indians themselves cleared.

The women did all the work in the fields. They planted the crops, tended them, and finally harvested them. About the only thing the men did was to guard and protect the fields when enemies were close by or if enemies attacked.

Corn was the most important crop that the Indians raised, and it was a very important part of the Indian diet. It was harvested late in the summer when the ears were almost ripe. The Indians prepared corn in a number of ways for eating. Some of our corn dishes today, such as corn bread, succotash, and hominy, are prepared in much the same way as they were by the Indians a long time ago.

Roast corn on the cob was a favorite Indian dish. The hot coals of a fire were scraped away and the unhusked green ears were placed on the hot ground and covered with ashes. Then the hot coals were pushed back over the ashes and the fire was built up and kept going until the ears were thoroughly roasted. A less troublesome way of roasting corn was simply to build a fire between two logs that were set close together and then lay the ears of corn across the logs.

Parched corn was a favorite "on-the-trail" food of the Indians because it was light, took up very little space, and could be made into a nourishing gruel without cooking. The kernels of raw corn were parched slightly in the hot coals of a fire. A little maple sugar was mixed with the kernels, which were then pounded into a fine meal. Sometimes dried berries were added and ground up with the corn, and sometimes chopped meat was added to this mixture. Whenever the Indians had time to eat, they simply added a little water to the mixture and had a plain



but satisfying snack. Maple sugar, however, was never added when the corn was to be eaten on the trail by the hunters or the warriors, for the Indians believed that, because the branches of the maple trees were tossed about by the winds, the maple sugar would make the men dizzy! Parched corn mixed with bear fat was another on-the-trail food, as was popcorn, which the Indians either ate whole or ground into flour and cooked with venison and wild rice.

The Indians cultivated several kinds of beans. The most common were lima beans and kidney beans. Beans were planted in the corn fields along with pumpkins and squashes. Beans were grown by almost every tribe of farming Indians in North America. The many varieties and names of beans tell us that beans have been grown from very early times.

Squashes and pumpkins were sometimes eaten fresh, but they were usually preserved. The Indians removed the seeds and the rind and then cut around the pumpkins and squashes in large circles to make long strips about an inch thick, which were hung up on racks to dry. When the strips were dry they were tied together and stored away. Cooked with meat and corn they made a flavorsome dish.

The Indians generally ate one regular meal a day, although it seems that often they ate whenever they were hungry. The Indian men, as a rule, were served first by the women.

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Third of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

WILD PLANTS

by

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Wild Plants

In addition to cultivated plants like corn, beans, and pumpkins, the Indians used a great many wild plants, of which wild rice was the most important. It was known to all of the northern Indians, and it was the chief food of the Menomini Indians who, many years ago, lived in what is now Wisconsin.

Great stretches of wild rice grew along the shores of lakes and rivers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and southern Canada. Wild rice was an important winter food for the Indians. It was also an important food for ducks, geese, and other waterbirds found in northern waterways and marshes.

The Indians gathered wild rice just before it ripened. They poled their boats out to the wild-rice beds. The stalks were bent over the boat so that as the heads of the plants were beaten with a wooden club the grains fell into the bottom of the boat. When the boat was filled it was poled back to shore. The grains of rice were first dried in the sun and then put in a hole in the ground that had been lined with animal skins. After a man had stamped on the grains to loosen the hulls, the rice was placed on large birchbark trays and tossed up in the air to allow the wind to blow away the loosened hulls. Last the rice was washed. Then it was ready either to be cooked or to be stored away for future use.

The Indians particularly enjoyed wild rice cooked with wild-fowl and game, just as we do today. Sometimes the Indians cooked the wild rice into a tasty pudding that they flavored with maple sugar. The Indians made an especially delicious soup by boiling wild rice and blueberries together.

The woodland Indians ate the starchy roots of several water plants. The yellow lotus, which was the most favored and most widely used, did not grow in all of the woodland lakes, and so the Indians sometimes had to travel great distances to collect it. The Indians used the growing tips of the large underground rootstocks. The tips, which were about the size and shape of a banana and contained a large amount of starch, were cut off, tied together, and hung over the fire to dry in the smoke. They

made a tasty potatolike food for winter eating. The Indians ate the seeds also, which they either roasted, as we roast chestnuts, or cooked and added to various corn dishes. Also edible are the young leaves and leaf stalks of this plant, which is known, too, as the American lotus or water chinquapin.

Another water plant that the Indians gathered for its starchy roots was the yellow pond lily, or spatterdock. The Indians often raided muskrat houses for these roots, which the animals had stored away for the winter. The Indians cooked the starchy roots with meat or roasted them. The seeds of the yellow pond lily were dried and eaten like popcorn.

The underground bulb of the jack-in-the-pulpit, or Indian turnip, as it is sometimes called, provided the Indians with another starchy food. If eaten raw, the bulb causes great pain because it contains thousands of tiny crystals that pierce the tongue and the inside of the mouth. The Indians got rid of the stinging by cutting the bulb into thin slices and baking them or by boiling and drying them. The slices were then used in a variety of ways, but especially as a flavoring.

The Indians of the Chicago region also used the cattail and the common milkweed in cooking. The rootstock of the cattail was either boiled into a thick starchy soup or it was roasted. The flowers and buds of the milkweed were used to thicken soups and to add a very pleasant taste to various dishes.



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Fourth of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

NUTS AND BERRIES

by

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Raymond Foundation



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Nuts and Berries

Nuts and berries were found in large quantities in the northern and eastern woodlands of the United States. Such foods were gathered whenever they were available, and they were very highly thought of by the Indians.

In the early days there were great numbers of hickory, black walnut, beech, chestnut, and oak trees in this region. The Indians made good use of every kind of nut. The nuts were collected by the women and the children after the first frost. The frost loosened the nuts so that they fell to the ground, where they could be gathered easily.

The Iroquois Indians of the eastern woodlands added the ground meats of hickory nuts, black walnuts, and chestnuts to corn meal. The mixture was then baked to make a heavy but nourishing bread. The Indians made a kind of cream or butter by crushing hickory nuts and boiling both the meats and the shells. The oily "milk" that appeared during the boiling was the Indians' cream. Sometimes crushed nutmeats were added to corn soup to make it richer.

Oil obtained from nuts was widely used by the Indians. Black walnuts, hickory nuts, and other nuts were boiled in water very slowly and the oil that rose to the surface was carefully skimmed off and stored away for future use. Sometimes



instead of storing the oil the Indians boiled it again to make gravy that they ate with bread, pumpkins, potatoes, squashes, and other foods. The boiled nutmeats were mixed with mashed potatoes. Oil was also obtained from seeds of the sunflowers that were often grown in Indian gardens.

The beech tree was very common in the eastern woodlands. The Forest Potawatomi Indians collected beechnuts in an interesting way. Beechnuts are the favorite food of the deer-mouse. This little creature stores up great quantities of beech-nuts for winter eating. It hides the nuts, all carefully shelled, in hollow logs or dead trees. After the first winter snows the Indians had little trouble finding the storehouses, each of which contained four to eight quarts of shelled nuts.

The Indians used many kinds of acorns. All acorns contain a substance called tannin, which makes them bitter. Some acorns have more tannin than others. The Indians knew that by boiling the acorns in water to which wood ashes had been added the bitter tannin would be removed. After they were boiled, the acorns were dried in the sun and then pounded into meal or flour. Acorn meal was added to soups or made into a mush that was very much like corn-meal mush. The sweetest acorns came from the white oak and the chestnut oak. These were the acorns that the Indians used most, but when it was necessary they used even the bitterer acorns of the red oak and the black oak. After the acorns fell to the ground with the first frost, they were gathered by the women and children.

The forest also offered a wealth of berries, which the Indians ate either raw or cooked. Berries to be stored were placed on flat baskets or on boards and dried in the sun or by the fire. Sometimes the berries were mashed and shaped into little cakes that were dried in the same way and stored in elmbark boxes. Later the dried cakes were soaked in water and made into sauce or mixed with corn meal to make a nourishing bread. The Indians liked many kinds of berries, such as wild black currants, blueberries, Juneberries, elderberries, raspberries, and black-berries. Wild strawberries were, however, the great favorite of all the woodland Indians.

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Fifth of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

BEVERAGES

by

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Beverages

Water was, of course, the most common Indian drink. To make sure that there would always be enough water for their daily use, the Indians built their villages close to rivers, lakes, and streams. Besides ordinary water, the Indians drank tea-like and coffeelike beverages. To make these drinks the Indians used a variety of plants and plant parts.

The Kentucky coffee tree was used by the Indians and the early settlers to make "coffee." It is one of the last trees to put forth leaves in the spring and one of the first to shed them in the fall. It was given its Latin name *Gymnocladus*, which means "naked branch," because the tree is bare for so much of the year. The Indians roasted the seeds and ate them as nuts, or they roasted the seeds until they were, as the Indians described it, "too done." Then the scorched seeds were ground up and boiled to make "coffee."

The Iroquois Indians made a coffee drink from corn. Whole ears of dried corn were carefully roasted over hot coals. The roasted kernels were scraped from the cob and pounded into a coarse meal, which was then boiled. A little maple sugar was added as flavoring. Roasted sunflower-seed shells were also used to make a coffeelike drink. The seeds were ground and sifted after they had been roasted. Only the shells were saved. Covered with boiling water, they made a tasty drink.

It is said that sometimes the Indians even used the wild plum to make "coffee." The fruits, which were cut open so that the seeds could be removed, were spread out on trays or on flat baskets and left to dry in the sun. The "coffee" was made by pouring boiling water over the dried fruits.

The woodland Indians also drank a tealike beverage that they made from various plants. One such drink was made from roots of the sassafras tree, which is familiar to us because of its mitten-shaped leaves that turn a beautiful yellow in the fall. The roots were cut into small pieces and boiled to make a delicious tea for the Indians, and for the settlers too. Because of its pleasant taste the colonists often served sassafras tea at



weddings. During Colonial days sassafras roots were very highly regarded in Europe and were in great demand. It is said that the root of the sassafras was the first plant product to be exported from New England. Tea was also made by boiling the leaves of such plants as Labrador tea, wintergreen, and even strawberry. The rootbark of the raspberry, the small tender twigs of the sweet birch, and the bark of the chokecherry were other common sources of tea.

Many kinds of berries were used to make drinks that were a regular part of an Indian meal. These drinks were made of blackberries, huckleberries, strawberries, or raspberries and water sweetened with maple sugar. But often at mealtime the Iroquois Indians drank only the water in which the meat or the corn bread had been boiled.

A very popular summer drink, very much like our lemonade, was made from the velvety red berries of the staghorn sumac. The staghorn sumac is a shrub that is easily recognized because its young fuzzy twigs branch out like the antlers of a stag. The red berries were sometimes eaten raw by the Potawatomis, but the settlers did not like the berries that way because they were too sour. Some of the berries were dried and stored away to be used in the winter as needed.

At certain times of the year the Iroquois Indians made a drink from the sap of the sugar maple tree. Sometimes the maple sap fermented to the point where it made a mildly intoxicating beverage. And sometimes this drink turned into a kind of vinegar, which the Indians also drank.

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Sixth of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

MAPLE SUGAR

by

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Raymond Foundation



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Maple Sugar

Maple sugar is one of the most enjoyable gifts that the Indians have given to us. The eastern woodland Indians used maple sugar in almost all of their foods.

Sugaring time came in early spring. When the days became warm and sunny but the nights were still freezing cold, the sap began to move. Sometimes this happened as early as February and lasted until April. Sugaring time was the high spot of the year. The work was hard, but everybody had a good time, especially the children, who were allowed to make taffy by pouring the syrup on the snow to harden. They even drank the sap just as it came from the tree.

Everyone had a job to do. The men repaired the sugaring camp and the large containers in which the sap was boiled. The women carefully washed the birchbark pails and resealed the cracks with pitch from the fir tree.

When the sap began to move, about three hundred sugar maple trees were tapped for their sugary sap. A V-shaped gash was slashed in the bark, and a spout of elder was attached at the point of the V. Under the spout a birchbark pail was hung to catch the dripping sap. It took twenty-four hours for about two gallons of sap to drip from each tree. When the pails were full they were collected and the raw sap was poured into large basswood vats for temporary storage.

The first flow of sap was always the best and the last was the worst. The Indians, however, never threw away any of the sap, for they were sure that by doing so they would offend the gods or spirits, who, in turn, would punish them by stopping the flow of sap completely.

The vats of raw sap were carefully protected from the sun because the sap soured very readily. Later the sap was boiled down in large containers over a slow fire. The scum that always appeared during the boiling was skimmed off as it rose to the surface. As it boiled, the sap thickened into syrup. To test the consistency of the syrup a little of it was poured on the snow now and then. When the syrup candied, or hardened,

it was ready to be poured into molds. The Menomini Indians poured the warm thick syrup into wooden troughs where, as it cooled and hardened, it was crushed and pounded into lumps. Finally the maple sugar was stored away in birchbark baskets to be used as needed. Maple syrup was made by boiling the sap for a shorter period of time and pouring it out before it started to sugar, or turn grainy.

This method of making maple sugar was worked out by the woodland Indians long before the time of Columbus. We make maple sugar today in exactly the same way the Indians did.

Not only did the Indians get sugar from maple sap but they also got a kind of vinegar by allowing some of the sap to become sour. This vinegar was used in preparing venison. Later the venison was sweetened with maple sugar. This is much the same, of course, as our sweet-sour method of cooking.

In those early times everyone used maple sugar. Its slightly burned flavor was enjoyed by the Indians, and by the settlers too. Very little white cane sugar was used by the settlers because it was too expensive. Only the very wealthy could afford it. Today, of course, everyone uses white sugar. Although one does not have to be wealthy to eat maple sugar today, it is much more expensive than white sugar. We eat maple sugar mostly in the form of candy or in the maple syrup that we pour over our pancakes at breakfast.



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Seventh of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

SEASONING

by

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Seasoning

Several kinds of plants were used by the woodland Indians to flavor their foods. One important plant used as a flavoring was a kind of wild onion that grew in great numbers many years ago in the rich moist soil of the Chicago region. Some say that the name "Chicago" comes from "shika'ko," the Indian word meaning "skunk place," which probably was a good name for the area. It must not have smelled very good.

The wild onions were gathered early in the spring when the underground bulbs were round and plump. The Indians removed the strong burning taste of the bulbs by placing them in ovens and covering them with a layer of grass. The heat did not damage the bulbs. After the bulbs had been dried in the sun they made a flavorsome addition to Indian meals.

Another important and popular seasoning used by the woodland Indians was wild ginger. Today the wild ginger is a fairly common plant, forming large sprawling mats throughout the rich woodlands of the Chicago region. The broad heart-shaped



leaves, three to six inches wide, are more familiar to us than the blossoms, which appear early in spring and last a very short time. The creeping aromatic rootstock was the part of the plant that the Indians used as a seasoning.

The descendants of some of the Indians who lived in the Chicago area a long time ago now live on a reservation near Tama, Iowa. From the nearby Iowa River the Indians catch large numbers of catfish. These Indians still use the wild ginger as a seasoning. They cook it with the catfish to take away the muddy flavor and make the fish tasty.

Maple sugar was an important flavoring. The Indians used it in a great number of dishes. We, of course, know it best as a syrup for pancakes or as a candy, but, for the Indians, it took the place of salt. The Indians used very little salt in the early years, and even today they use very little of it. The Indians seasoned even their meats with maple sugar, which does not sound really strange to us because we flavor hams with brown sugar. But would we enjoy having our fish flavored with maple sugar as the Indians did?

The woodland Indians also used the berries of the spice bush to flavor some of their dishes. The berries were dried and ground into powder. This flavoring tasted very much like the allspice that we have in our kitchens today.

Both the Indians and the early settlers considered the mint their favorite flavoring. We still use mint, and with it we flavor sauces, chewing gum, and jellies. The Indians called it the "fragrant herb." By crushing the leaves and stems in water the Indians made a pleasant-tasting drink. Sometimes they stewed mint leaves with meats or added them to soups. Occasionally when dried or smoked meats were being stored away for winter eating, a layer of mint leaves was placed between two layers of meat. Thus while it was stored away the meat took on a mint flavor that increased with the length of time that the meat was stored. The aroma of mint leaves is so strong that Indian trappers sometimes placed their traps in a boiling solution of water and mint leaves to take away the human smell that causes animals to avoid traps.

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Eighth of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

MEDICINES

by

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Raymond Foundation



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Medicines

The forests of the eastern United States offered many things to the Indians—food, drink, shelter, and even medicines for their aches and pains and cuts and bruises. Some of the Indian remedies were effective and others were not. Some of the Indian medicines seem very strange to us because today we know that they could not possibly do what they were supposed to do. Yet the Indians must have believed that their remedies were good, for they continued to use them. Minor ailments were treated by near relatives, but serious illnesses were always treated by a medicine man or woman.

Many different plants and plant parts were used to make medicines. When the plants were gathered, special ceremonies were held and special songs were sung, and the plants were collected in a special way. This is what made the plant medicines do their work well, the Indians thought.

The plants were carefully carried back to the village, where they were washed and dried in the sun. Sometimes several plants were mixed together and stored for future use.

Doses of Indian medicines were rarely small. Usually great quantities had to be taken. Just like modern medicines, Indian medicines did not taste good. The Indians hid the bad taste by adding strong flavorings. Wild ginger was a popular flavoring for Indian medicines.

For colds the Potawatomi Indians drank a tea made by boiling the roots of the black-eyed Susan. They also collected and swallowed the small lumps of resin, or gummy fluid, that oozed from the trunk of the balsam fir. These Indians believed that the pleasant smell of dried balsam needles also would cure colds. For this reason they collected the needles and used them as stuffing for pillows.

The Potawatomi Indians made a tea from the leaves of the wintergreen and drank it to break a fever and to ease the pains of rheumatism and sore muscles. Today we know that wintergreen leaves contain a substance that is also an important part of aspirin, and we use aspirin to reduce fever and to ease the



aches and pains of a cold. Another Indian remedy that is still used today is witch hazel. The twigs of the witch hazel shrub were used by the Potawatomis in their sweat baths. The twigs were placed in water that was heated with hot stones. The steam that rose as the stones were placed in the water relieved aching muscles. The leaves and bark were used to make an astringent or a soothing solution, which was applied to sprains and bruises to relieve the pain and discomfort. The witch hazel astringent that we buy at the drug store today is made in the same way from the same plant, and it is used for the same purpose that the Indians used witch hazel.

The early settlers collected many of the same plants that the Indians used for medicines, both those that worked and those that did not work. Every pioneer home, for example, had a bunch of boneset hanging in the kitchen. From this plant a tea was made, and large quantities of it were drunk to cure colds and malaria. The Indians crushed the leaves and stems of this plant to make a poultice that they placed over insect stings or over poison-ivy blisters to get relief.

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Ninth of a Series on
PLANTS THE AMERICAN INDIANS USED

BARK AND BAST

by

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Raymond Foundation



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Bark and Bast

Although the dwellings of the woodland Indians were made in different shapes, all houses had a framework of poles covered with bark or mats. To make their houses as well as their canoes and a great many of their household articles the Indians who lived in the north used the bark of the paper birch that grew along rivers and the shores of lakes.

In the spring, when the sap began to move, the bark was peeled off the trees in large sheets. The bark was loosened just enough to make this possible, if it were done carefully. The sheets of bark were rolled up and taken back to camp where they were flattened out. The Indians placed the bark, inner side down, on the ground and held the bark down by setting heavy stones on top of it. The bark flattened as it soaked up moisture from the ground. When it was flat, the bark was ready to be made into many different articles.

The canoe was probably the most important thing made of birchbark. Graceful and easily carried and handled, the Indian canoe was perfect for traveling in the wilderness. Later the birchbark canoe became just as important to the early explorers as it was to the Indians.

Farther south where the paper birch was scarce, the bark of other trees was used for houses. The Potawatomi Indians, who lived in the Chicago area, covered their houses with bark from the slippery elm and white elm. Strips of bark six feet long were taken from the trees and flattened in the same way that the northern Indians flattened birchbark. The Indians sometimes used the bark from the hickory, poplar, cottonwood, white cedar, and spruce trees for their houses.

Chicagoland Indians made their winter houses of cattail mats. In the winter, when it was too cold to do any farming, the Indians went into the forest to hunt. Since they were on the move constantly, the Indians had to live in a house that they could put up in a hurry and take down in a hurry. The large summer house, covered with pieces of bark, was too big and took too much time to build. The house made of cattail

mats was much easier to put up and take down. It was, however, a very uncomfortable house in which to live, according to modern standards. The bitterly cold winter winds made it necessary for the Indians to keep a big fire burning in the house all the time in order to be comfortable.

The inner bark, or bast, of several kinds of trees was made into cordage or string. One of the best sources was the inner bark of the basswood. Long narrow strips of bark were peeled from the trunk and soaked in water for several days to loosen the inner bark so that it could be easily separated from the outer bark, which was thrown away. By running a fingernail along the edge, the Indians separated the inner layer into slender threads that were then boiled to separate them and make them flexible. Large balls of basswood twine were always kept on hand to be made into rope or whatever was needed. Bags, mats, baskets, and sometimes even fishnets were made of basswood fibers. Fibers were also obtained from the inner bark of young hickory, pawpaw, and osage orange.

The outer rind of the common milkweed plant provided the Indians with a very fine thread that they used for sewing and for making light fishlines. Indian hemp was another important source of fibers for the Indians. The soft silky fibers from this plant were worked into threads that were much finer and stronger than our cotton sewing thread of today.



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